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ABSTRACT

The MELD for Young Moms (MYM) program serves adolescent mothers by providing support and information about parenting in groups that are facilitated by women who were once adolescent mothers themselves. This study focused on gathering two types of information about the nationally replicated MYM program: (1) demographics of parent group facilitators and parent participants; and (2) program outcomes for parent participants. Standardized measures and survey techniques were employed to examine how parenting and child rearing techniques were influenced by program participation and to gather data to provide a demographic portrait of facilitators and parents. Overall the results indicated a positive and significant shift in attitudes and beliefs toward parenting and nurturing children, indicating that this group of parents are at low risk for child abuse and neglect. Specific results about parents' attitudes and beliefs following participation include the following: (1) parents had more appropriate expectations of their child's abilities; (2) parents increased their ability to be more empathically aware of their child's needs and to respond in an appropriate fashion; (3) parents believed less strongly in the value of corporal punishment; and (4) parents knew that their child did not exist to please and love them, and instead began to understand that it was their responsibility to respond to their child's needs in an appropriate fashion. (A copy of the Demographic Tally Parent Participants and PGFs (facilitators) and the participant informed consent letter are appended.) (AA)

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The MELD for Young Moms Program

A National Study of Demographic and Program Outcome

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The MELD for Young Moms Program

A National Study of Demographics and Program Outcomes

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THE MELD FOR YOUNG MOMS PROGRAM
A National Study of Demographics and Program Outcomes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MELD for Young Moms (MYM) program serves adolescent mothers by providing support and information about parenting in groups that are facilitated by women who were once adolescent mothers themselves. This study focused on gathering two types of information about the nationally replicated MYM program: one, demographics of parent group facilitators and parent participants; and two, program outcomes for parent participants. The results will be presented in this Executive Summary.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1994, Site Coordinators (who manage the Young Moms Program in cities across the United States) provided demographic information for both parent group facilitators and parent participants. Twenty-one sites completed surveys and provided information about 61 parent groups. This sample represented 51 percent of the 41 sites that offered the MYM program in 1994.

Parent Group Facilitators

The data collected about 126 parent group facilitators gave a descriptive picture of the women who facilitated the 61 parent groups during 1994.

- On average, parent group facilitators were 31 years of age and had two children.
- Fifty-five percent of the parent group facilitators identified themselves as African American, 32 percent White, 11 percent Latina, less than 1 percent as Native American, and less than 1 percent as multi-racial or multi-ethnic.
- Fifty-one percent of the facilitators were married, 34 percent were single.
- Sixty-seven percent of the facilitators were employed part- or full-time.
- Forty-three percent of the parent group facilitators had a high school diploma and an additional 38 percent had post-secondary vocational or technical training or a college degree.

Parent Participants

Site Coordinators provided demographic information for 849 parents who participated in 61 groups of the Young Moms Program in 1994.

- Parent participants ranged in age from 12 years (one parent was younger than 12 years but her exact age was unknown) to 22 years of age, with an average age of 17 years.

Parent Participants: The Core Group

Site Coordinators were also asked to report on the educational status, employment status, and rates of subsequent pregnancies for parent participants who had attended at least 50 percent of all meetings offered to them in 1994. Of the original group of 849 parents, 336 (or 40 percent) matched this criteria. Findings for these parents indicated:

- Of the 336 core participants, 234 parents were of eligible age to attend a middle school or high school. Of these 234 participants, 181 (or 77 percent) were enrolled.

- Of the 336 core participants, 86 were of eligible age to have graduated from high school. All of these parents (or 100 percent) had a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma and were of eligible age to be enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Of these 86 parents, 46 (or 53 percent) were furthering their education at a post-secondary institution.

- 84 (or 25 percent) of the 336 parents were employed part- or full-time.

- 292 (or 87 percent) of the 336 parents did not become pregnant in 1994.

Program Outcomes for Parent Participants

A group of seven sites offering the MELD for Young Moms program participated in a study of program outcomes using the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (Bavolek, 1984). A total of 79 parents completed a self-administered pretest upon entry into the program and a posttest about nine months later during ongoing program participation. Parents were from diverse backgrounds: 61 percent White, 19 percent Latina, 15 percent African American, 4 percent Native American, and less than three percent indicated that they were of multi-racial or multi-ethnic heritage. All parents had a child under the age of three years, and were, on average, 17 years old at the time the pretest was completed.

Overall, the results indicated a positive and significant shift in attitudes and beliefs toward parenting and nurturing children. According to the literature in the field, these findings also indicate that this group of parents are at low risk for child abuse and neglect. Specific posttest results about parents' attitudes and beliefs are summarized below:

- Parents had more appropriate expectations of their child's abilities at the time of the posttest;
- Parents increased their ability to be more empathically aware of their child's needs and to respond in an appropriate fashion;
- Parents believed less strongly in the value of corporal punishment; and
- Parents knew that their child did not exist to please and love them; instead, they knew it was their responsibility to respond to their child's needs in an appropriate fashion.

THE MELD FOR YOUNG MOMS PROGRAM

A National Study of Demographics and Program Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that the majority of adolescent females would benefit by postponing too-early pregnancy (Roosa, 1991), nearly one million adolescent females are becoming pregnant every year in the United States (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1991; Henshaw, Koonin, & Smith, 1991; Hollmann, 1993). Much has been written about the negative social, economic, developmental, and emotional consequences of early parenthood upon the young mother and her child (Card & Wise, 1978; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987; Kuziel-Perri & Snarey, 1991; Patten, 1981; Teti & Lamb, 1989). Research suggests that the provision of social support may serve to protect adolescent mothers from some of these negative consequences by preparing them to become better parents and by encouraging the postponement of subsequent pregnancies (Nath, Borkowski, Whitman, & Schellenbach, 1991).

The MELD for Young Moms program (MYM) uses peer-facilitated groups to provide information and social support in order to improve the lives of the young mothers and their children. The goals of this study were to assess whether the Young Moms program promotes the development of appropriate parenting and child rearing beliefs and to gather information from the MYM program sites across the United States to provide a demographic portrait of parent group facilitators and parent participants.

THE MELD FOR YOUNG MOMS PROGRAM

For over twenty years, MELD has developed, tested, and replicated parenting education and support programs across the United States and in other countries. One of the programs, the MELD for Young Moms program encourages the participation of single, young mothers very early in the life of their first child. Groups meet weekly for two years. Assistance with transportation and child care is provided by the program in order to address the barriers to program participation that many young mothers experience. Many groups begin their meetings with a meal where parents, children and the parent group facilitators eat together. Culturally-matched women from the community (who were once adolescent mothers themselves) facilitate groups of younger mothers who are program participants. These peer facilitators, known as parent group facilitators, help parents make decisions

and solve problems together in a group setting. Parent group facilitators receive extensive training in group facilitation skills and in the MELD for Young Moms curriculum. They learn how to balance the provision of information and social support using a group discussion format.

During 1994, MELD for Young Moms program operated in 41 sites across the United States. In some of these sites, the program was offered in high school settings or through agencies located in the community--such as social services agencies or hospitals. Site Coordinators, employees of the local agencies, manage the program in the locations where the program has been implemented. These Site Coordinators are responsible for the recruitment of the parent group facilitators and parent participants, community outreach, group arrangements, training and supervision of parent group facilitators, and the day-to-day administration of the program. Program Replication Managers, who are MELD employees, oversee these national sites and provide technical assistance to the Site Coordinators. In addition, Program Replication Managers train Site Coordinators, supervise curriculum development, and provide ongoing educational opportunities for Site Coordinators through an annual seminar for all MELD national staff.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

This report summarizes information gathered through study activities sponsored by MELD, using general operating support and funds generated through the national replication of the MELD for Young Moms program. Parent group facilitator and parent participant demographics were collected from the national sites between January 1, 1994, and December 31, 1994. The following questions guided this part of the study:

- What is the demographic profile of parent group facilitators?
- What is the demographic profile of parent participants?
- What is the educational and employment status of the parent participants who attended at least half of the program in 1994?
- What are the rates of subsequent pregnancies among the parents who attended at least half of the program in 1994?

Data regarding program outcomes for parent participants was collected between May 1, 1992 and May 31, 1995. Information was collected to assess whether attitudes toward parenting and child rearing were influenced by participation in the MELD for Young Moms Program.

A sample of seven sites were invited to participate in a study

examining program outcomes. These sites were selected based on several criteria: geographical location, racial and ethnic background of Young Moms participants, length of involvement as a MELD affiliate, agency type, and settings where groups were offered. The sites who participated are listed below:

- Van Nuys, California;
- Yreka, California;
- Grand Junction, Colorado;
- Clinton, Iowa;
- Des Moines, Iowa;
- Toledo, Ohio; and
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Four of the sites were located in urban cities of varying sizes, two in rural communities, and one site was located in a medium-sized town. Two of the sites served an African American population and another a White population of parents. The remaining four sites served a mix of Young Moms participants--Latina and African American, Native American and White, Latina and White, and African American and White. Site vary in their length of affiliation with MELD--from three years to 13 years. The average length of affiliation was nine years. Five of the agencies were social service agencies, one was a health service agency, and one agency was located within a public school district. Three of the sites conducted their groups in community settings. Two sites offered groups in both school settings and in the community, one offered groups in both school settings and in agency settings, and the remaining site conducted groups in community settings and agency settings.

In assessing program outcomes for parent participants, a one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. As early as possible after program entry, parents were asked to complete a pretest using a re-titled version of the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI). After approximately nine months of program participation, parents were asked to complete a posttest version of the AAPI. This instrument will be explained in greater detail in the following section of this report.

METHODS

Standardized measures and survey techniques were employed in this study in order to 1) examine how parenting and child rearing beliefs were influenced by program participation and 2) to gather data to provide a

demographic portrait of parent group facilitators and parent participants.

Program Replication Managers were trained in the areas of data collection by the principal investigator so that they could convey these procedures to the Site Coordinators during regularly scheduled technical assistance phone calls. Site Coordinators assisted with data collection procedures by completing demographic surveys and administering instruments with parent participants.

Parent Group Facilitator and Parent Participant Demographics

All Site Coordinators were asked to completed a demographic survey for each of their groups that operated during 1994 (see Appendix for a copy of the demographic survey). This survey consisted of a variety of demographic items for parent group facilitators and parents. For example, age, marital status, racial and ethnic background, number of children, level of education, and employment information was requested for parent group facilitators. Demographic information about parent participants' age upon entry into the program and racial and ethnic background was also requested. Finally, Site Coordinators were asked to report on the educational status, employment status, and rates of subsequent pregnancies for all parent participants who had attended at least 50 percent of all meetings offered in their group during 1994. The rationale to examine these three elements for a smaller group of parent participants was that based on the intensity and duration of the their involvement with the MELD for Young Moms program, it was reasonable to anticipate that the program might have an impact on these elements. This smaller group of parent participants will be referred to as "core participants" in the remainder of this report.

Program Outcomes for Parent Participants

The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) is a self-report instrument that measures an individual's attitudes and beliefs toward parenting and child rearing in four areas: 1) parental expectations of children, 2) empathy, 3) attitudes about corporal punishment, and 4) beliefs about roles in the parent-child relationship. This instrument is used by professionals to provide an indication of the individual's abilities to parent children in a non-abusive manner. The AAPI has been normed on a wide variety of individuals with respect to race, age, gender, and level of risk for abuse. Items in each of the four subscales results in an internal reliability equal to or greater than .70. The total test-retest reliability of all of the items is .76 (Bavolek, 1990).

The AAPI consists of 32 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating *strongly agree* and 5 indicating *strongly disagree*. Scoring the instrument involves summing responses within each of the four subscales and then converting totals into sten scores which may range from 1 to 10. Sten scores provide an index of risk (high, medium, or low) for practicing abusive and neglectful parenting and child-rearing behaviors. Lower sten scores indicate greater levels of risk in the areas of child abuse and neglect.

Specific procedures were followed in order to ensure honest responses from parent participants completing the AAPI. Program Replication Managers were instructed to inform Site Coordinators about establishing parent participant informed consent procedures and offered a sample consent form to use during the study (see Appendix for a copy of the sample informed consent form). Prior to administering the pretest versions of the AAPI, Site Coordinators were asked to explain to parents that participation in the study was voluntary and that their involvement with the program would not be affected by their refusal to participate in the study. Next, parents were assured that all information was confidential and that parent identification numbers would replace their names on the instruments before data analysis. In addition, it was explained that individual parents would not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study. After Site Coordinators provided this information to parents, they were instructed to ask parents to sign an informed consent form if they agreed to participate in the study.

FINDINGS

This section of the report will present findings for the demographic component of the study as well as the results about participant outcomes.

Parent Group Facilitator and Parent Participant Demographics

A total of 21 sites, representing 61 parent groups, submitted demographic surveys. This sample of sites represents 51 percent of the 41 national sites who offered the MELD for Young Moms program in 1994. Site Coordinators reported demographic information for 143 parent group facilitators and for 849 parent participants.

Parent group facilitators. On average, two parent group facilitators worked with each group. These facilitators ranged in age from 19 years to 50 years of age, with an average age of 32 years. Most parent group facilitators were African American (55 percent) followed by 32 percent who were White,

12 percent who were Latina, less than one percent who were Native American, and less than one percent who were multi-racial or multi-ethnic (see Figure 1).

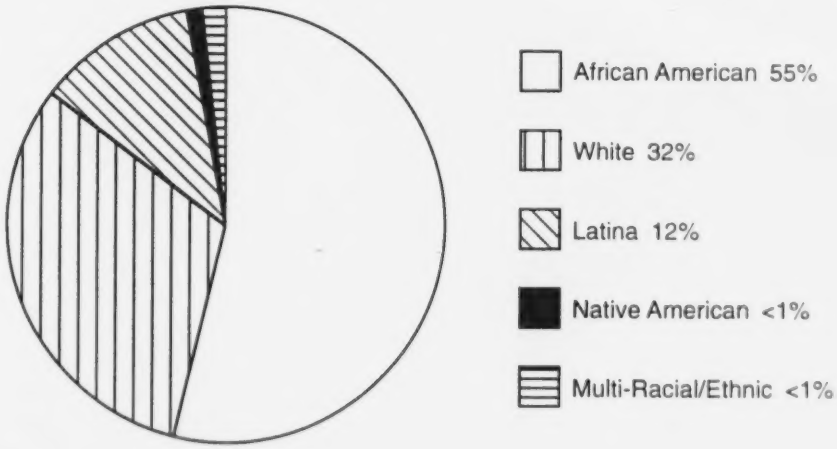

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Background of Parent Group Facilitators

Fifty-two percent of the parent group facilitators were married and another 39 percent were single. The remaining nine percent were divorced, widowed, separated, or their marital status was unknown. On average, facilitators have two children. Forty-nine percent of all facilitators had a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma and another 38 percent had post-secondary vocational or technical training, an undergraduate degree, or a graduate degree (see Figure 2). Sixty-seven percent were in paid employment, part-time or full-time, when the demographic survey was completed.

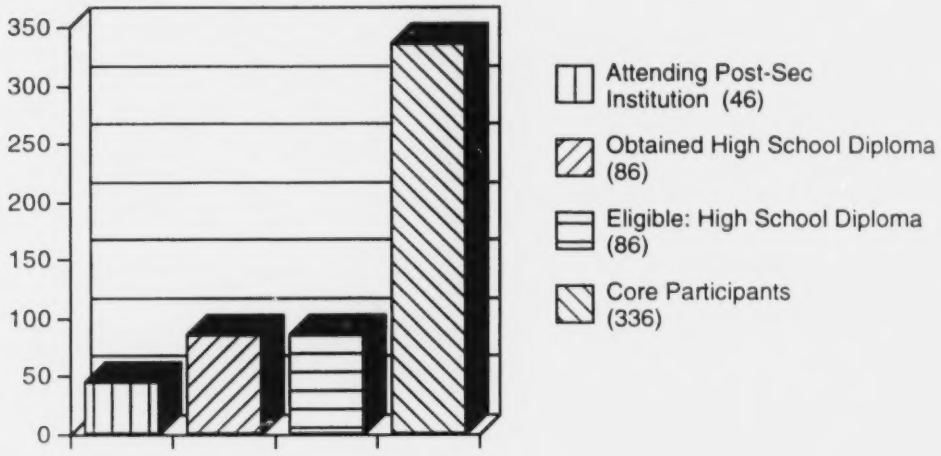

Figure 2. Educational Status of Parent Group Facilitators

Parent participants. Parent participants ranged in age from 12 years or younger (one parent was younger than 12 years but her exact age was unknown) to 22 years of age, with an average age of 17 years. Most of the parents were African American (47 percent) followed by 28 percent who were White, 18 percent who were Latina, two percent who were Native American, two percent who were multi-racial or multi-ethnic, and less than one percent who were Asian American (see Figure 3).

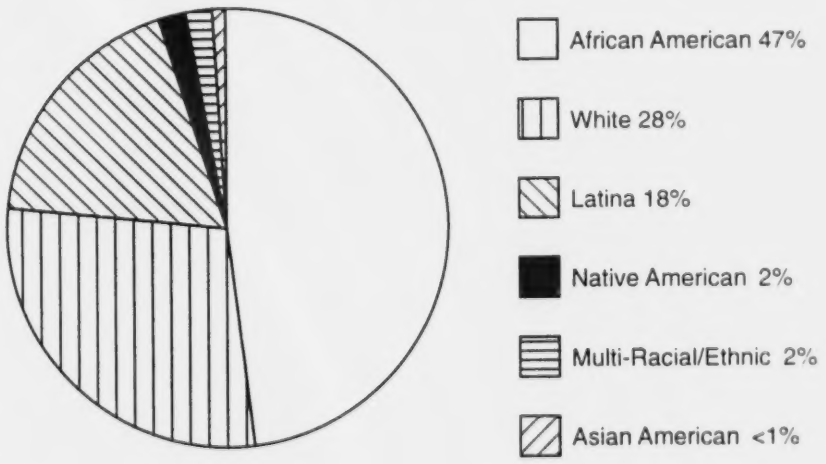

Figure 3. Racial and Ethnic Background of Parent Participants

Core participants. As indicated earlier in this report, Site Coordinators were asked to report on the educational status, employment status, and rates of subsequent pregnancies for parent participants who attended at least 50 percent of all meetings offered during 1994. Of the 849 participants reported on earlier in this section of the report, 336, or 40 percent, matched this criteria for core participants. Findings for these participants indicated:

- Of the 336 core participants, 234 were of eligible age to attend a middle school or high school. Of these 234 participants, 181, or 77 percent, were currently enrolled (see Figure 4).

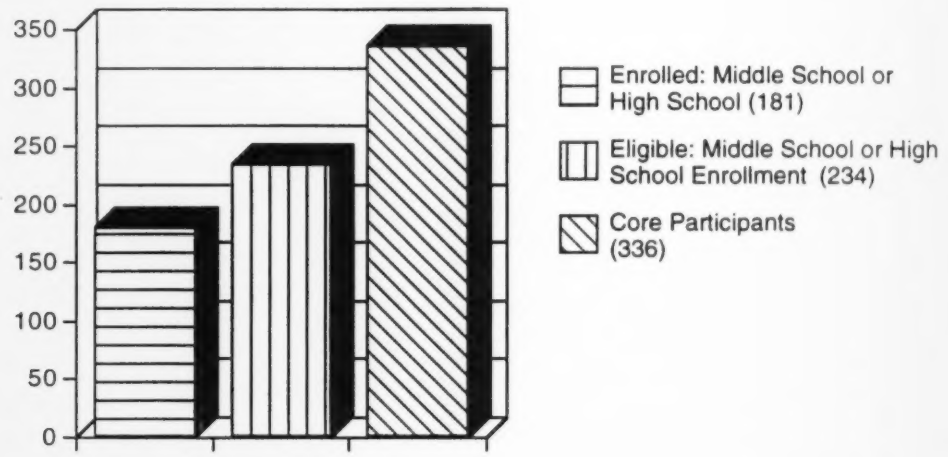

Figure 4. Middle and High School Enrollment for Parent Participants

- Of the 336 core participants, 86 were of eligible age to have graduated from high school. All of these parents, or 100 percent, had a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma. Furthermore, 46 parents, or 53 percent, of the 86 who were of eligible age to have graduated from high school were furthering their education at a post-secondary institution (see Figure 5).

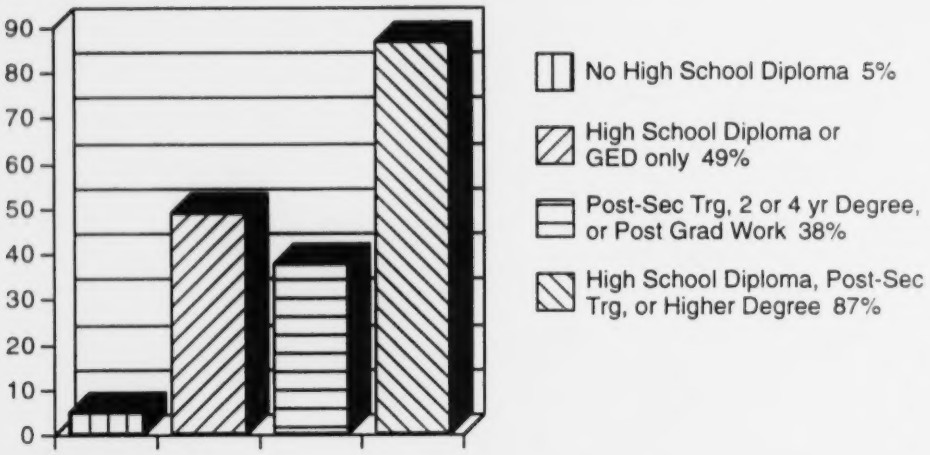

Figure 5. High School Graduation Rates and Post-Secondary Enrollment for Parent Participants

- Of the 336 core participants, 84 parents, or 25 percent, were participating in some type of paid employment.

- During 1994, 292 parents, or 87 percent, of the 336 core participants did not become pregnant. Thirty-three parents, or 10 percent, did become pregnant again during the report period.

Program Outcomes for Parent Participants

A total of 79 parents from seven sites completed a self-administered pretest upon entry into the Young Moms program and a posttest about nine months later. These parents were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds: 61 percent of the parents were White, 19 percent were Latina, 15 percent African American, four percent were Native American, and less than three percent of the parents indicated that they were multi-racial or multi-ethnic. Parents had a child under the age of three years and were, on average, 17 years old at the time the pretest was completed.

To assess whether parent participants' scores changed over time (from the pretest to the posttest), means were calculated separately for each of the four constructs (see Table 1). Next, paired different *t* tests were conducted with the normally distributed data to examine whether the pretest and posttest means were different in any of the four constructs using a .05 alpha level to determine statistical significance. The results indicated that the pretest and posttest means differed across all four of the constructs and were statistically significant in each of these constructs (see Table 2).

Table 1. Summary of Pretest and Posttest Data Using the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory with MELD for Young Moms Parent Participants

Construct[a]	Pretest n=79			Posttest n=79		
	Mean	Sten[b]	SD[c]	Mean	Sten	SD
A: Expectations	24.0633	7	3.506	25.6835	8	2.739
B: Empathy	31.2405	7	4.336	33.0506	8	4.723
C: Corporal Punishment	37.8861	7	5.811	39.9241	8	6.866
D: Role Reversal	28.0633	8	5.555	29.8101	8	6.367

Note. [a]Range of possible scores varies by construct: Construct A: 6-30 points, Construct B: 8-40 points, Construct C: 10-50 points, Construct D: 8-40 points

[b]Standard scores used in establishing the norms for the AAPI are N-stens. A sten is a special case of the standard score; hence, the name sten comes from a standard ten scale. N-stens are derived from a close study of the percentile distribution of the raw scores. They transform percentiles to stens according to the usual normal curve. N-stens are best used to determine where an individual stands in relation to a normal distribution of scores.

[c]Standard deviation

Table 2. ***t*** **Values of Scores for the MELD for Young Moms Parent Participants**

Construct	Pretest vs Posttest
A: Expectations	3.80 **
B: Empathy	4.19**
C: Corporal Punishment	3.18*
D: Role Reversal	2.81*

Note. $^{*}p \leq .01$
$^{**}p \leq .001$

Overall, the data demonstrated a positive and significant shift in attitudes and beliefs toward parenting and child rearing across all four constructs. Based on related literature in the family support field, the results also indicated that these parents are at low risk for child abuse and neglect (Bavolek, 1984, 1990). Specific results from comparing pretest and posttest scores indicated the following.

- At the time of the posttest, parents had more appropriate expectations of their child's abilities;
- Parents increased their ability to be more empathically aware of their child's needs and to respond in an appropriate fashion;
- Parents believed less strongly in the value of corporal punishment at the time of the posttest; and
- Parents knew that their child did not exist to please and love them; instead, they knew it was their responsibility to respond to their child's needs in an appropriate fashion.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study will be described separately for the demographic study and the program outcomes study in this section of the report.

Demographic Study

A constraint of the demographic study is the number of sites that participated in the data collection process. Twenty-one sites out of a possible 41 submitted demographic data; these 21 sites represented 51 percent of all the national sites that offered the MELD for Young Moms program during 1994. After comparing the sites that submitted data with the non-responding sites, one pattern emerged. MELD often contracts with statewide collaboratives to provide technical assistance to agencies who are interested in providing the MELD for Young Moms program as part of a larger package of services. Several of these sites did not submit a demographic survey. One of the realities of working with these collaboratives is acknowledging the bureaucratic layer that exists between MELD and the agencies. For example, agencies were asked to use multiple data collection forms and reporting systems to meet the requests for information not only from MELD, but from the agency itself and other funders. These reporting requirements placed a significant burden on agency staff.

MELD staff and the principal investigator have also been challenged to find ways to gather information from all sites without having any "leverage" to enforce the reporting component. In response, MELD staff and the principal investigator have attempted to create a flexible reporting system and also relied on the strong working relationship between MELD staff and Site Coordinators to encourage participation in the demographic study.

A final limitation of the demographic study emerged from the way in which the data was gathered about the rates of subsequent pregnancies. Because the birthdate of the youngest child was not documented as part of the demographic survey, the length of time the parent delayed a subsequent pregnancy could not be determined.

Program Outcomes Study

A one-group pretest-posttest design was used for this study. This type of design, while justified for use in this case, has methodological limitations,

mainly in the area of internal validity. For example, in absence of an experimental design using random assignment of parents, it is impossible to claim that the treatment (i.e., the MELD for Young Moms program) was completely responsible for the resulting changes in parenting and child rearing beliefs. In this case, it is possible that other factors, such as maturation of the parents or selection effects, caused these changes. Further study using an experimental design is warranted to address these issues in a more conclusive manner.

Two issues restrict the generalizability of the results from the program outcome study. First, the MELD for Young Moms program is an example of a voluntary prevention program--meaning that parents choose to attend or not attend. It has been demonstrated that the type of parent that voluntarily joins an education and support group differs in some important ways from the pool of eligible parent participants (Powell, 1979). For example, it is common for higher risk parents to drop out of voluntary prevention programs as compared to lower risk parents (NCPCA, 1992).

While the average age of the parents who completed AAPIs correspond to the average age of the MELD for Young Moms participants, the racial and ethnic profiles of these two groups differed. The sample of AAPI participants was comprised of a greater number of parents who were White and Latina whereas the data collected for the demographic study of the MELD for Young Moms program indicated a larger composition of African American parents. The group of 79 parents who completed pretest and posttest versions of the AAPI may not be a representative sample of the MELD for Young Moms participants. This precludes the generalization of these findings beyond this group of 79 parents who completed both a pretest and a posttest version of the AAPI.

Assessing the prevention of child abuse is a challenging undertaking. Most studies employ the use of proxy measures because detecting the absence or decrease of a behavior (such as the number of times a parent maltreats a child) is nearly impossible. Therefore, most studies use proxy measures which effectively assess attitudes or beliefs associated with child abuse. While these instruments may effectively measure attitudes and beliefs, they do not measure actual parenting practices and cannot predict future behavior. Therefore, the results of the program outcomes study are not meant to reflect actual behavioral changes in parenting practices.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

> Young mothers tend not only to be disadvantaged economically, educationally and socially at the time of their child's birth, but also tend to be at risk of falling further behind their more advantaged peers who postponed childbearing to obtain more education and to advance their careers. Teenage mothers, for example, obtain less education and have lower future family incomes than young women who delay their first birth. Many are poor later in life, and while it is clear that their initial disadvantaged background is a major reason for their subsequent poverty, it is also clear that early childbearing has a lasting impact on the lives and future opportunities of young mothers and their children (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994, p. 4)

This quote from the Alan Guttmacher Institute effectively captures some of the negative consequences associated with early parenthood. As described earlier in this report, the MELD for Young Moms program seeks to use social support and information to support young mothers during parenthood. Part of this program includes the acquisition of information and skills in child development. Program staff and facilitators also emphasize delaying or avoiding a second pregnancy, completing schooling, and planning for a future that includes a job or career.

This study has examined whether the MELD for Young Moms program is meeting its goals of supporting adolescent mothers during parenthood. The remainder of this report will present several findings from the study and discuss their implications for the MELD for Young Moms program.

AAPI Results

The comparison of pretest and posttest results from the AAPI demonstrated a positive and significant shift in attitudes and beliefs toward parenting and child rearing. The strongest gains were made in the constructs measuring parents' beliefs about corporal punishment and role reversal. The results also indicated that these parents were at low risk for child abuse and neglect. In absence of additional data, it is difficult to understand exactly how or why these changes occurred. MELD program staff are likely to attribute these changes to the combination of providing parents with information regarding child development, giving parents a range of discipline choices (de-emphasizing the use of corporal discipline strategies), and exposing parents to positive role models (the parent group facilitators). This approach of

providing information and support has been linked to helping parents adhere less to beliefs and behaviors surrounding authoritarian control of children among the MELD for New Parents participants as compared to other parents not involved in this program (Powell, 1993). Further study is needed to explain this phenomenon.

Educational Attainment

In terms of parent participant demographics, findings from this study indicated that 77 percent of all core participants were making progress toward completing high school. Of the 86 MELD for Young Moms participants who were of eligible age to have graduated from high school, 100 percent obtained their diploma. How do these high school enrollment and graduation rates of MELD participants compare to similar outcomes for other young mothers?

Testa and Bowen (1987) found that one of the two highest risk periods for dropping out of school is during the second and third trimester of the first pregnancy. Adolescents were five times more likely to drop out of school within the seven to nine months of the first pregnancy as compared to the period of time when they were childless. The authors reported that 30 percent of all African American teens in their study dropped out of school by the end of their third trimester of pregnancy and another 45 percent left school after the birth of their first child. For White and Latina females, 80 percent had dropped out of school by the birth of their first child and less than five percent of this group remained in school from the time of this first birth until graduation. A total of 575 teen mothers were studied as part of this project conducted in the state of Illinois.

One issue complicates the existing national data about high school completion rates for teenage mothers. Researchers (Upchurch & McCarthy, 1990) found that many young moms who drop out of school and give birth as teens were not doing well in school even before their pregnancy. If a young mom does drop out of school--for whatever reason--it is unlikely that she will return before her own children are in school (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987). The 1987 National Survey of Families and Households offers another source of comparison: 70 percent of all teenage mothers do complete high school, but not until they are 35 to 39 years of age. This figure of 70 percent can be compared to the 90 percent of their peers who complete high school and delay childbearing (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1993).

It is not surprising that fewer young mothers go on to college as compared to young women who postpone childbearing. Data from the 1987

National Survey of Families and Households indicated that of women aged 35 to 39 years of age who gave birth as a teen, five percent obtain a college degree and another 15 percent obtain a two-year degree or attend college for a short period of time (without acquiring a degree). Women aged 35 to 39 who gave birth at age 25 or older are much more likely to get a two year degree or attend college (24 percent) or obtain their college diploma (47 percent) (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1993). Of the MELD for Young Moms core participants, 46 percent of the parents who have their high school diploma were furthering their education at a post-secondary institution.

Figures of high school enrollment, high school graduation, and college attendance rates appear to be strong for the MELD for Young Moms participants as compared to other adolescent parents. Educational attainment is an important factor in the lives of young mothers--in part, because it strongly correlates with their future family income and whether they and their children will live in poverty.

Rates of Subsequent Pregnancies

Another important variable that is associated with her future earning potential and educational attainment is the timing of a second birth. For the MELD for Young Moms core participants, 87 percent did not experience a subsequent pregnancy during their program involvement in 1994. What is the impact of the birth of a second child? Having a second child within a few years of the first can keep a mother from completing high school (Kalmuss & Namerow, 1992), it increases her dependency upon the welfare system (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994), and repeat pregnancies often have adverse consequences for infant health outcomes (Trussell & Menken, 1978).

How long do adolescent moms typically delay second pregnancies? The Alan Guttmacher Institute (1994) reports that 19 percent of teens who become mothers at ages 15 to 17 and 25 percent of mothers who are age 18 or 19 when they first give birth will have a second child within two years.

Social programs that have aimed to reduce the rates of second pregnancies show mixed results. For example, in 1984, 28 projects funded by the Urban Institute did not measurably reduce repeat pregnancies. Polit and Kahn's evaluation of Project Redirection (1985) demonstrated that second pregnancies were less often experienced among parents (14 percent experienced a second pregnancy) in the Project Redirection group as compared to the comparison group (22 percent) during the 12 month study. However, after another year had elapsed, nearly half of the teens in both

groups had experienced a second pregnancy. These results suggest that program participation did not significantly affect the long-term incidence of a repeat pregnancy, but that participation was somewhat associated with a slight postponement of another birth. In another study, Kuziel-Perri and Snarey (1991) studied eight service programs provided by a nonprofit comprehensive service agency to determine the impact upon repeat pregnancy rates among African American adolescent females. Their study followed participants for four years and found that only 13.5 percent of the 52 mothers experienced a second birth after four years of their first pregnancy.

The question that remains to be answered is this: How long do teen mothers need to delay a second pregnancy in order to avoid the negative consequences that accompany this second birth? The literature describes the widening separation between the onset of adolescence and the achievement of independent adulthood when many young unmarried women are giving birth. The younger the adolescent is at the time of the birth of her first child, the more disruptive this birth will be to her schooling and ultimately, to her long-term economic well-being (Testa & Bowen, 1987). It makes sense, then, that a second pregnancy only compounds these issues, and the longer a teen mother can avoid a second pregnancy, the more likely she is to complete high school; become economically self-sufficient; and mature physically, emotionally, and socially.

QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The results of this study suggest exploring several questions further in future research projects. For example, repeating the collection of demographic information for the MELD for Young Moms program is needed in order to obtain a larger sample of national sites who participate in the study. A larger sample will provide a more accurate picture of the population of parent group facilitators and parent participants.

Looking more closely at the rates of subsequent pregnancies is also needed. The results generated for this study provided limited information about the length of time that parents delayed another pregnancy. Adding an additional question to the demographic survey regarding the birthdate of the youngest child is recommended.

Examining parent participant outcomes using the AAPI should also continue. While outcomes for parents who participate approximately nine months have been compiled, continuing to follow these parents into their second year of participation will provide further information about the

program's impact. In addition, the number of sites participating in the outcomes study should be broadened to increase the number of sites with a predominantly African American parent population to mirror the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the MELD for Young Moms participants on a national basis.

In a more systematic study, additional background information about parent participants would provide an opportunity to understand how their personal backgrounds might impact their educational attainment, rates of subsequent pregnancies, and program outcomes.

FINAL COMMENTS

Conducting this study was a useful endeavor for the MELD for Young Moms staff in the central office and in the national sites. For several years, program personnel had to rely on informal assessments or anecdotal evidence about who the program was serving and whether it had an impact upon the parents. While it is important to note that this information played an influential role in shaping the questions and methods of the study, a broader, more systematic effort was needed to explore these questions.

The process of conducting this study and examining the results has had multiple benefits for the MELD for Young Moms program. Participating in the study design process helped staff to examine assumptions and revisit program goals. The data collection phase was instructive because it increased the MELD Program Replication Managers' understanding of how MELD's informational needs meshed or conflicted with other systems of data collection and reporting used in the national sites. The Program Replication Managers and the principal investigator also learned about Site Coordinators' capabilities around program evaluation and the need for further training in this area. In addition, discussing the results has guided future program development and improvement. For example, MELD staff at the central office presented the results of the study to national program staff at their annual seminar and then identified strategies for retaining parent participants during the two year program.

All family support programs should be committed to a purposeful process of self-examination and reflection that occurs on a regular basis. The field of family support is limited in that there is a lack of information about how programs work, for whom, when, where, and why (First & Way, 1995; Weiss, 1988). Furthermore, in today's political climate, family support programs are often pressured to prove that these efforts can effectively

address many of the social problems facing our society. As the demand for information about program effectiveness grows, nationally replicated, highly visible programs like MELD need to respond and lead the field forward in the quest for understanding.

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APPENDICES

for **MELD** *Young Moms*

Demographic Tally
Parent Participants and PGFs

Today's Date_____

Group Name_____ Group Begin Date_____ Group End Date_____

Site Coordinator_____ City_____ State_____

Instructions: Please provide the following information about parent participants and PGFs. **Provide information only for parents who attend at least three meetings**; do not provide information for parents who attended group once or twice.

PGFs

PGF Initials	Age	Race Ethnicity	# of Children	In paid employment when group ended?	Last educational degree completed?	Marital status
____	____	_____	_____	yes no	_____	____
____	____	_____	_____	yes no	_____	____
____	____	_____	_____	yes no	_____	____
____	____	_____	_____	yes no		

Parent Participants

Age upon entry into program

- 12-year-olds or younger ____
- 13-year-olds ____
- 14-year-olds ____
- 15-year-olds ____
- 16-year-olds ____
- 17-year-olds ____
- 18-year-olds ____
- 19-year-olds ____
- 20-year-olds ____
- 21-year-olds ____
- 22-years-old or older ____
- Unknown ____

Race/Ethnicity

- African Am/Black ____
- Asian Am ____
- European Am/White ____
- Hispanic Am/Latina ____
- Native Am/Indian ____
- Other ____
- Unknown ____

Children

Number of children of parents when group ended ____

Please submit a demographics tally at the end of each reporting period.

Instructions: Please provide the following information about "core" parent participants. A "core" parent participant is someone who has attended 50% or more group meetings during this reporting period and is currently enrolled in the program.

- Number of meetings this reporting period: ..... — — — — —

  X .50

- Number of meetings a parent needed to attend to qualify as a "core parent: ..... — — — — —

- Total # of "core" parent participants = ... _____

Educational Status

_____ # of "core" parents who are attending or enrolled in school (K-12)

_____ # of "core" parents who are not attending school (K-12)

of "core" parents who have a high school diploma or GED who:

_____ ▪ **are** enrolled or attending a post-secondary institution

_____ ▪ **are not** enrolled or attending a post-secondary institution

_____ # of "core" parent whose educational status is unknown

_____ **TOTAL** (this number should equal the total number of "core" parents that you are reporting on; please place parents in one category only)

Employment Status

_____ # of "core" parents currently in paid employment

_____ # of "core" parents not in paid employment

_____ # of "core" parents whose employment status is unknown

_____ **TOTAL** (this number should equal the total number of "core" parents that you are reporting on; please place parents in one category only)

Repeat Pregnancies

_____ # of "core" parents who did not become pregnant this reporting period

_____ # of "core" parents who did become pregnant this reporting period

_____ **TOTAL** (this number should equal the total number of "core" parents that you are

_____ reporting on; please place parents in one category only)

MELD
Blending information and support for parents

123 North 3rd Street, Suite 507
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401

612 / 332-7563 (V/TTY)

Ann Ellwood
Executive Director

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a study of this program. This program is being studied to find out if it is helpful for young moms like yourself. At a couple of times you will be asked to answer some questions about being a parent.

Everything you answer will be kept TOTALLY PRIVATE. NO ONE AT YOUR HOME OR IN THE GROUP WILL SEE YOUR ANSWERS. You may be asked to write your name on the forms so that a code number can be put on it later. Code numbers are used to match up your answers now and in the future. Once a code number is put on the form, your name will be removed.

You can choose not to participate at any time. Your choice not to participate will not affect your membership in this program. If you agree to participate, please sign in the space below. If you have any questions, please ask your Site Coordinator.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christa J. Treichel
MELD 123 No. 3rd Street
Minneapolis, MN 55401
(612) 332-7563

I understand that when I sign this I am agreeing to participate in this study. I know that I can drop out of the study at any time. I also understand that any information I give about myself will be kept private and that no one at home or in my group will be told anything I say.

_____ _____

Date Name

_____ _____

Date Name

MYM Consent 93 National Date Collection Project